

## **talking shit** by 221BFakerStreet

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**Summary:**

"They say that in the womb human beings form asshole first. That's not true- the mouth forms first, but Billy isn't sure there's much difference when it comes right down to it. Everybody around him spends their time talking shit, and the taste doesn't seem to bother them much."

## talking shit

They say that in the womb human beings form asshole first. That's not true- the mouth forms first, but Billy isn't sure there's much difference when it comes right down to it. Everybody around him spends their time talking shit, and the taste doesn't seem to bother them much.

In California he'd been a lot of things: invisible, irredeemable, irascible. He is still those things in Hawkins, Indiana, but they are magnified somehow, like the kid in fifth grade who used to roast ants with a magnifying glass just because he could. Billy'd always hated that kid. Tries not to think too hard or too often about becoming him. He's had a lot to distract him over the years. Those distractions are magnified, too, and multiplied.

Max makes it harder just by existing, and he doesn't know how to handle her. He knows how to handle Neil, in the sense that he knows what brand of organized chaos to expect.

Every time Neil pushes him around, diminishes him, humiliates him, he compresses it into a molten core. Spits fire every once in a while, erupts. The parallels don't entirely escape him, but volcanoes do volcanic things, and he exists as he is formed.

Billy thinks that if anyone, out of all the human specimens that have ever come to be, was formed asshole first it had to have been Neil Hargrove.

He thinks maybe Max agrees with him on that, but family is a strange creature in a jungle at night. Max cares. Max is terrifying. The people who care about him die.

Better not to care at all.

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Steve Harrington is a dick. He's a dick because he won't take the bait, won't dance the dance. His annoyance at Billy seems tangential, like a

mosquito in a war zone; he's got bigger problems. Billy can't connect it to anything rational, but Steve is so far under his skin he's got hives. He'd like to return the favor.

He breaks his keg stand record and dubs him "King Steve", and Tommy laughs and Steve looks like he wants to be anywhere else. He pushes him around on the court and Steve gets lippy, but seems to resign himself to Billy's meanness. Billy tells him to plant his feet. Steve looks like he might listen.

By the end of the first week, Billy's not sure if he wants to kiss him or kill him. And that's better than nothing, he wagers.

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There is only land and stagnant water to be found in this godforsaken shitbog and he constantly licks his lips but never tastes the salt sea air on his tongue. He swears it's driving him mental. Swears Steve is getting prettier every minute.

He's at the quarry, down by the water. There's a broken bottle of Neil's whiskey by his feet (he'll pay for that later) and he's throwing rocks at the water like it's committed a mortal sin. It's not the ocean, so to his mind that's sin enough for stoning.

It's Steve that finds him there in the morning, passed out in the driver's seat of the Camaro, and this is all he remembers. Billy wonders at the structure of the universe, this infinite wreckage that allows his half-baked daydreams to come to fruition in the most unfortunate ways. And then he upchucks onto the dirt path that serves as a road, and King Steve is making a grossed out face and helping him into his own car. He tries not to worry about that, but nothing is free.

"Why do you *care*?"

If it comes out more pleading than pissy, neither one of them mentions it.

"Who knows, Hargrove?" He says, reaching over to make sure Billy's

buckled in properly. “Just do.”

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Max breathes a sigh of relief when she sees him, and Billy wants to fight someone. He recognizes that he's not at home, edges on his own relief until they're inside and he realizes whose house he's actually at.

“Taking me home on the first date, Harrington? Didn't think you were that kinda girl.” The words crawl out of his mouth before he can stop them, and slither away into the ear canals of Steve and Max, and a whole group of assorted misfits that he only now realizes have been sitting around the living room this entire time.

Steve just looks at him as though he regrets every single thing he's ever done in his life. Billy wants to punch himself in the face. Instead he ruffles Max's hair- just this side of too rough- and snickers when she knocks his hand away, rolling her eyes.

“Alright, dumbass, come with me.” Steve is already halfway to the kitchen by the time Billy understands that *he* is 'dumbass'. Thinks he might still be a little trashed, because he follows along like a fucking lost puppy. He hates feeling helpless. Hates feeling beholden.

“Did shithead ask you to come get me?”

Steve rolls his eyes and presses just a tad too hard on a bruise blooming over his jaw. Neil is usually careful, but Billy's really been pissing him off lately. It's a weird, morbid race: *“let's see who can kill Billy first, Billy or Billy's dad!”*

“Max told me she was worried.” Steve's voice is very close, and very annoyed. It softens somewhere in between two breaths, in a weary sort of way, as he continues “she also told me not to bring you home, but *I offered to look.*”

He says this all at once, as though that will keep the sticky sweet sappy bullshit from coating Billy's lungs so that he can't quite catch his breath. As though it's not too much to say, or think, or feel. Those big doe eyes are examining his bruise and Billy is trying not to

tremble while the world comes apart in this unfamiliar kitchen that feels so much like a home he's never had.

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Billy starts hanging around when he goes to drop Max off. Neil thinks he's studying, and sometimes he does. Mostly he just watches, eats a disgusting amount of snack foods, and tries to glean the secret to being a person from a group of Jr High dweebs and their Mr. Mom babysitter.

It all seems so easy, so fluid, for them. They are a weird little family, cobbled together from necessity.

He notices that Steve's parents are never home. When they are, they're like ghosts moving out the front door, always on their way somewhere more important. One time he sees Steve shake his own father's hand when they're saying goodbye, his mother already halfway to the car, and he can't decide which is worse: a business meeting or a brawl.

The kids, The Party, play D&D for hours. He watches and listens until he thinks he gets the gist of the game, until he gets into the story. He never plays, himself.

"Barbarian," El says one night. They're all taking a break to get snacks, and she takes the seat next to him on the couch, holding a can of root beer.

"What?" He hates how dumb he sounds, but he's on uneven footing here. He's interacted superficially with the kids, played a part, tried to keep his distance. It's all Max's fault, or maybe Steve's fault, but it hasn't fucking worked, and he's so very lost.

"If you wanted to play," she says, staring into his eyes in that unsettling way she has, "you'd be a Barbarian."

A beat of silence, in which they stare at each other. El opens her drink with a metallic click and a soft hiss.

"Like swords. Fight. *Protect.*" The emphasis on the last word pierces

something inside him. His armor is frail, penetrated by what should've been a glancing blow. He thinks he'd make a *terrible* Barbarian. Shit, he can't even protect *himself*.

El smiles at him then, and suddenly the thought of her somehow knowing his secret, his frailty, is like an absolution. Because for whatever pain or flaw she sees in him, she must see something good there, too. Something worth saving.

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Billy drives too fast. Billy terrorizes Max because he can't stand up to his old man. Sometimes- *most* of the time- Billy believes everything Neil says about him.

Billy tells all of this to Steve one night, sitting together in his back yard in the grass. Because Steve, despite everything, cares for him. He cares unassumingly, solidly, genuinely. He cares like he's breathing. And Billy needs to tell someone, because he doesn't actually want to die, not anymore. The words live outside of him now, carved raw from his chest. There is no ocean here in Hawkins, Indiana, but *oh* he can taste the salt sea air tonight.

That night Steve makes the mistake of holding his hand, but it's only a mistake because Billy will just fuck this up, too.

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Billy, to his surprise, does not fuck it up.

### Author's Note:

This all started out from an incorrect but nonetheless hilarious bit of trivia I heard somewhere. I wrote some of it on pain meds after surgery, and it's very stream of consciousness. Also barely edited. So enjoy my first official Haringrove fic. See it also on [my fancy tumblr blog](#).